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AGRICULTURE

Landmark Export Deal for Afghan Juice Factory:

Consumers in Europe will soon be savoring the sweet taste of Afghanistan. The United Kingdom's leading pomegranate juice company recently agreed to a deal worth nearly \$4.5 million with Afghanistan's first juice concentrate facility. Pomegreat became the first international company to purchase juice concentrate from Afghanistan, committing a minimum of 500 tons of pomegranate concentrate and 500 tons of fresh fruit from the Omaid Bahar Fruit Processing Facility.

"Being given the chance to source the best pomegranates in the world from their spiritual home is something I couldn't overlook," said Adam Pritchard,



A worker inspects pomegranates before the fruit is turned into juice concentrate.

PHOTO: USAID/ASAP

chief executive officer of Pomegreat. "The Afghan pomegranate is the best in the world."

"I am proud to have built this factory, and the commitment from Pomegreat gives me great hope for the future," said Mustafa Sadiq, owner of Omaid Bahar Fruit Processing Facility.

The Omaid Bahar Fruit Processing Facility, which opened in October 2009 with support from USAID, receives fruit from 50,000 farmers from at least seven provinces across Afghanistan. The facility provides approximately 200 full-time jobs, with women composing about 35 percent of the staff. USAID provides technical assistance, a cold storage facility, equipment, logistical support, and market linkages with farmers and international buyers.



A school management committee member addresses students at the school opening ceremony in Nowyab village.

PHOTO: USAID/PACE-A

EDUCATION

Communities Across Afghanistan Celebrate the Start of the New School Year: In late March, USAID-supported community-based classes celebrated the start of a new school year with the enrollment of more than 40,000 male and female students in 2,000 classes throughout the country.

School opening ceremonies were held in most of the communities. In Nowyab village in Parwan province, female members of the school management committee, children, and their parents held a celebration for the entire community. Village elders spoke about the importance of education and placed emphasis on increasing female participation in

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educational activities. "I am very pleased that once again I have the opportunity to attend my class, meet classmates, and learn. I hope one day, each and every Afghan girl will have the opportunity to go to school for as many years as she wants," stated student Gul Cheen.

Graduation at Kabul Education University Marks a New Era: On March 10, 2010, 41 students in Kabul celebrated their graduation from Master's of Education (MEd) programs, made possible due to support from the U.S. Government. Almost half the graduates earned their degrees from Kabul Education University, while the others studied abroad at Indiana University or the University of Massachusetts.

The graduates are professors of education from around Afghanistan. The increased number of faculty members with advanced degrees will help revitalize the quality of teaching in education departments throughout the country. Fifty percent of the MEd graduates are female, which is a major breakthrough for Afghan universities, where women were banned from working and studying during the Taliban period.



U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry presents a graduate with her diploma.

PHOTO: USAID/HEP

More than three hundred people attended the event, including U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, who said it was a "truly historic occasion" and that education would "contribute to making Afghanistan and the world a much better place for everyone." The graduation marked both the end of two years of hard work for the proud students and the beginning of an effort to improve the quality of education for future teachers in Afghan schools.



AUAF students mingle with members of Kabul Dreams.

PHOTO: Mohammad Shariq

The American University of Afghanistan Rocks for Charity: On March 4, 2010, the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) hosted quite possibly the first ever rock-and-roll concert on an Afghan college campus. The concert was organized by the AUAF Music Club as a fundraiser to benefit children and families in Kabul-area settlements. Ticket proceeds of more than \$1,800 were used to buy blankets for internally displaced persons.

The concert was sponsored in part by Kabul Rock Radio, 108 FM, Afghanistan's only rock-and-roll radio station, and its parent the Killid Media Group (TKG), a

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non-profit independent media initiative of Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA). TKG promotes civic engagement, free speech, and open discourse in Afghanistan and strengthens the press as an independent source of information for Afghans.

The concert was broadcast live on Kabul Rock Radio. It opened with traditional Afghan music played by world-renowned artists from the Aga Khan Trust for Culture section of the Aga Khan Development Network. The Aga Khan musicians were followed by the only all-Afghan rock-and-roll band, Kabul Dreams, which includes AUAF students. The AUAF Music Club plans to organize similar events in the future to allow the AUAF community to enjoy time together while raising money for charity.



A presenter answers questions during one of the Grand Rounds discussions in Kabul. PHOTO: USAID/HEP

Grand Rounds Discussions Enrich Kabul Medical Community: Lacking exposure to the latest medical trends and techniques in their specialty areas, medical professors in Afghanistan often teach using outdated curriculum and materials. Fortunately, the USAID-funded Higher Education Project is addressing this problem through Grand Rounds discussions.

Grand Rounds are presentations of current trends in medicine followed by an interactive question-and-answer session with the audience. More than 140 doctors, midwives, nurses, and medical students attended the first discussions held in three teaching hospitals in Kabul. Two hospitals held presentations

on preventing and managing heart disease, while the third focused on clinical care in the management of diabetes.

These discussions provided an opportunity for approximately 50 healthcare clinicians with international experience to engage with the medical community in Afghanistan. Participants found the rounds motivating and closely related to the medical challenges they face every day. They also requested additional presentations on surgery, radiology, and anesthesiology.

Building the Knowledge and Skills of Secondary School Teachers: This March, USAID's Building Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST) project held a workshop in Kabul to develop an accelerated learning program for teachers. The accelerated learning program will offer an opportunity for existing teachers who have completed grades 6 through 11 to study and gain the knowledge required to complete a secondary education and, eventually, enroll in a teacher training college.

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The workshop participants developed test questions for subjects taught in grades 7 to 12. These test questions will be used in exams to determine whether teachers have the required knowledge of secondary school subjects to qualify for entry into teacher training colleges. Workshop organizers optimistically expected to generate 3,000 questions from the workshop, but ended up developing 7,000 test questions. Organizers attributed the success to excellent support from the Ministry of Education (MoE) Teacher Education Department and the hard work of the 62 participants. The participants included officials from the MoE Curriculum Department, teacher training colleges, high school teachers, and university professors. Participants worked together in teams to check the accuracy and clarity of the questions.



Afghan education experts participate in a test question writing workshop.

PHOTO: USAID/BESST

"This workshop reached the target and now there are enough questions for different subjects for grades 7-12.

We really appreciate BESST's cooperation to develop such workshops and trainings," commented an experienced staff member from the MoE Curriculum Department. With the support of USAID, the MoE is taking steps toward developing a system to assess the knowledge and skills of high school teachers.



Men in Khawja Shahab build a boundary wall for the local high school.

PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM
Village High School in Hirat Secured by USAIDfunded Boundary Wall: A high school in rural Hirat
is now a safer place in which to learn thanks to a new
boundary wall built by USAID and the local
community. In response to a request from community
elders and teachers in Khawja Shahab village,
USAID's Local Governance and Community
Development (LGCD) project worked with Afghan
stakeholders to fund the construction of a boundary
wall around the Khawja Shahab Village High School.

The community cited security, vandalism, and adequate privacy for female students and their

teachers as critical problems that could be alleviated by a barrier wall. USAID coordinated with the Hirat Province Directorate of Education, district government officials, the Guzara District Development Assembly, community development councils, and representatives of the nearby PRT to design and implement the project. In addition to strengthening

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secondary education in the village, the processes of identifying the need for this project, securing funding, and completing construction increased linkages among local, district, and provincial officials and the community at large. Building the Afghan Government's responsiveness to community needs is a key mission of LGCD, USAID's flagship stabilization program in Afghanistan.



Staff of the Shinwari District Center receive IT equipment funded by USAID.

PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

Energy: In a wide-reaching initiative aimed at improving local government responsiveness to citizens' needs, USAID's Local Governance and Community Development (LGCD) program recently installed networks, computers, and solar lighting

Powering Local Government with IT and Solar

installed networks, computers, and solar lighting systems in five district centers throughout Afghanistan. These seats of government, located in Nangarhar, Paktya, and Ghazni provinces, are at the forefront of a country-wide push to improve public services and the credibility of Afghanistan's government. By working directly with government officials, USAID is fostering community trust and helping to create opportunities for peaceful cooperation and improved livelihoods. In each of the

five district centers cited above, for example, LGCD also trained local government staff to operate and maintain the IT networks and solar power systems.

INFRASTRUCTURE

USAID Helps Make MEW's Vocational Training Center a School of Choice: The Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW) established the Vocational Training Center (VTC) in 1976 with the vision to provide technical training to employees of MEW, as well as establish a technical high school and a two-year technical vocational school. VTC aims to educate and train Afghanistan's youth to become science and technology professionals, while also providing facilities for scientific seminars and specialized short courses to increase professionals' skills. While the conflicts in Afghanistan have limited the development of VTC, the U.S. Government started providing support in 2006.



The VTC school director oversees the entrance exam process.

PHOTO: USAID/AEAI



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Now, thanks to modern electrical/electro-mechanical laboratory equipment, increased access to computer and English classes, upgrading of instructor skills via mentoring and developmental workshops, student interest in attending VTC across Afghanistan has increased dramatically. On March 17, 2010, 400 applicants, including 10 women, took the entrance test for the evening classes at the technical vocational school (grade 13) level. The 130 highest-scoring applicants will be accepted into the program. USAID continues to support VTC so that it will become a sustainable technical training center serving the people of Afghanistan.

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Radio Roundtable Links Civil Society and Parliament: On March 16, 2010, USAID's Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS) project conducted a radio roundtable discussion, bringing together members of parliament (MPs) and representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs). During the roundtable, participants discussed the creation of political space for CSOs, CSO interactions with parliament, and CSO involvement in the policy-making process. The discussion featured four participants: two MPs and two CSO representatives. The hour-long program was aired on Killid Radio on March 23, reaching a potential audience of 12.5 million in the provinces of Kabul, Balkh, Hirat, Kandahar, Kapisa, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Parwan, and Wardak.

On the topic of collaboration between parliament and civil society, roundtable participant Ms. Palwasha Saboori, director of Afghan Women Training and Development Organization (WTDO), shared, "This is the *first* time that I have had the opportunity to talk about our problems directly with MPs." She continued, "I know that MPs are expected to act as the representative for different groups of people... but their six-day workweek and the poor security situation in the provinces means that they have few opportunities to spend time in remote areas, to find out what people really need and say." At the close of the program, Ms. Saboori asked the MPs to allow for and attend regular meetings with civil society organizations and activists "so that parliament actually hears voices of everyone." This radio roundtable program will be followed by three additional I-PACS roundtables in the next six months.